



"THE HOUSING OF THE POOR."

BY THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF GUIANA.

IT is not a question which can be settled off-hand. There are many serious considerations which must be taken into account before a question like this can be satisfactorily solved. That there is pressing need for improvement in this direction *every one will admit*. We can all point to dwelling houses in which a rich man would hesitate to place his dogs. There are whole families herded together under conditions which render *cleanliness and decency* next door to impossible, and which are not only an ever-threatening menace to society and a misery to the poor themselves, but a disgrace to our Statesmanship and our nineteenth-century Christianity. And further than that, most will admit that such a state of things *ought* not to be, and many, too, have determined that it *shall* not be. The problem we have to face is, how can this unsatisfactory state of things be remedied? And the difficulty of solving the problem seems to be greater the closer we look into it. Is it to be remedied by the interference and aid of the State, or through private charity, or through the landlord, or by the poor themselves?

The State has lately passed an Act which gives power to the Local Authority to prevent habitation in unsanitary dwellings. On the petition of a certain number of householders the Local Authority is bound to investigate and to decide whether property is in a sanitary condition or otherwise. If it is declared to be unfit for habitation, they can compel the landlord to put it into habitable repair; and if he refuses to do so, they can, if they like, close it up or pull it down. That there has been culpable negligence in enforcing the Act of Parliament none will deny, and this negligence arises from many causes. It may be true, as is sometimes said, that the individuals who constitute the Local Authority in towns are more interested

in securing a good return for their money laid out than they are for the welfare of their poor tenants. This is not generally so, however; and perhaps the greatness of the evil, and their powerlessness to know where to begin, or how to grapple with a question so far-reaching and intricate, has as much to do with their inaction as any other reason, for it is not a single house here and there which needs putting right, but there are whole streets, and blocks of buildings, badly lighted and drained, and supplied with no conveniences, utterly unfit for habitation, and which could not by any amount of repairing and patching be made so; and the only satisfactory way in which they can be dealt with is to pull them down.

One special feature of our age is the drift into towns from the country, and there is, in consequence, a keen competition for dwellings by the labouring classes, and especially if near their work, and the supply of suitable healthy dwellings is not equal to the demand; nor could they pay for them out of their wages, if it were, consequently they crowd into any kind of dwelling which their means will cover, and from *necessity*, rather than *choice*, fill up tenements which are unfit for families to dwell in. How is the evil to be remedied?

Make the landlords put their property into proper repair says one. Certainly they should be made to do this, if it can be done; but there are houses which we all could point to which the most liberal and willing landlord could not make fit for human dwellings. They are badly situated, badly planned, and badly built. He cannot alter the position, nor widen the streets, to admit light, nor re-plan the building, nor remove the ash-pits and water-closets from too close proximity to the doors and windows, nor suitably provide these if they do not exist. Besides, that would not relieve the overcrowding. To build or alter